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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a mainstreaming model implemented at a high school in the Richardson Independent School District (Texas) for about 15 years. Implementation of the model has resulted in full mainstreaming of all special education students. The model's emphasis is on empowering students who have disabilities with the skills to be successful in mainstream classes. It also stresses flexibility in the amount of resource time provided each student, motivation of the student, and building independence and self esteem. Innovative qualities of the program also include a constant team approach for each student over a 3-year period, positive parental involvement, and consultation/collaboration between mainstream and special education teachers. Factors to consider in implementing and replicating this model are listed, such as having clear goals, "selling" the plan to faculty, and ongoing evaluation. Positive results have been obtained from such program evaluation measures as amount of time students are in the mainstream; gains in test scores; attainment of Individualized Education Program objectives; and satisfaction of teachers, parents, and students. (DB)

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MODEL FOR MAINSTREAMING: THE SYNERGISTIC APPROACH

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Sixteen years ago former Lake Highlands High School principal, Jimmy Fountain, approached special education teachers Evelyn Pope and Vicky Chase about mainstreaming their students into regular classes. At the time, students with learning disabilities were taught in small, self-contained classes, as was the norm across the country. However in 1976, Lake Highlands became one of the first schools nationwide to implement mainstreaming. Fifteen years and thousands of success stories later, Pope and Chase have been honored in Houston with the Innovative Practice Award, given to outstanding special education programs throughout Texas. Both Vicky and Evelyn give the faculty most of the credit. One of their goals is to act like a bridge to get each and every student where he/she wants to go. Other goals are academic success and promoting self-esteem in every one of their students. Over the years, the program has been fine-tuned in various ways to meet their students' needs. This innovative practice is Model for Mainstreaming, The Synergistic Approach.

MODEL FOR MAINSTREAMING: THE SYNERGISTIC APPROACH

This innovative program was developed at Lake Highlands High School in the Richardson Independent School District in Texas. This program serves special education students with the following handicapping conditions: Learning Disabled, Mentally Retarded, Emotionally Disturbed, Speech Handicapped, Other Health Impaired, and Visually Impaired. This program serves grade levels 10-12. Model for Mainstreaming has been in existence for fifteen years. There are approximately 120 students served.

OBJECTIVE:

To provide successful mainstreaming of all special education students by empowering them with the skills to be successful not only in mainstream classes, but in the mainstream of life and provide all teachers the skills of leadership to manage and encourage change.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION;

All of our special education students are fully mainstreamed, and the amount of resource time is not set at a fixed amount but is based on each student's individual need so the goals and objectives of the IEP are met. Flexibility is to Synergy as oil is to machinery. Flexibility allows Synergistic Mainstreaming to run smoothly. A special education teacher coordinates and manages all the services for one grade level. A teacher gets a group of students as they enter the 10th grade

and she moves up with them until they graduate. The counselors also keep the students for a three year period resulting in a very cohesive team of student, special education teacher, counselor, parent, and administrator. Students in our program have shown great improvement in four major areas: academic skills, self-esteem, compensatory skills, and problem-solving.

The main factors which have made Synergistic Mainstreaming so effective and successful are motivation, independence, and flexibility. Motivation is naturally built into the program. Being successful in "regular classes" with mainstream teachers is much more meaningful to the special education student. Stressing independence, Synergistic Mainstreaming begins a cycle of success which builds self-esteem which encourages more independent functioning academically and socially. The students grow in mastery of skills, initiative and creativity in problem solving and become more realistic in assessing their strengths and weaknesses. This realistic assessment gives them a more realistic approach to life after high school. With its flexibility, each student can use the program as much or as little as needed within the parameters of his IEP. This need can vary slightly from week to week or from semester to semester. Mainstream textbooks can be used as effectively as resource materials to meet the goals and objectives of the IEP.

This program encompasses the best of both mainstream education and special education. Each special education student gets the expertise of a curriculum specialist who is the mainstream teacher, and he gets the expertise of a

technique and strategy specialist who is the special education teacher. A special education student is taught each subject by someone who is highly qualified in that subject area. One role of the special education teacher is to insure that the student is taught in the most effective manner possible for him to be successful. Other roles are to teach transitional skills and behaviors which are necessary for success in mainstream classes and to coordinate all efforts among the student, regular education teachers and special education teacher. Each student is guaranteed an opportunity for success.

INNOVATIVE QUALITIES OF THIS PROGRAM:

Innovative qualities include flexibility of resource time based on individual student needs , constant team approach for each student for a three year period, positive parental involvement, flexibility with special education /mainstream teachers in consultant /collaborative methods resulting in a synergistic approach. Synergistic Mainstreaming has prepared the faculty with leadership skills and instructional techniques that have resulted in effective cooperative teaching.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE PROGRAM TO THE DISTRICT/CAMPUS:

Model for Mainstreaming, The Synergistic Approach, became the model for the other high schools and junior high schools as RISD moved to mainstreaming. On the local campus of Lake Highlands High School, Synergistic Mainstreaming enabled successful inclusion of the more severely handicapped students

in the vocational skills and behavior adjustment classes.

DESCRIPTION OF EDUCATORS, PARENTS, STUDENTS, AND OTHERS
INVOLVED IN DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM:

Synergy is the key to the interaction of the team members. Team members consist of special education teachers, mainstream teachers, counselors, parents, and students. Each team member's role is defined, but it also flexes and changes while interacting with other member's roles. Each team member draws from and gives to the other members, and all team members become stronger than before. However, each team member keeps its own unique identity.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN IMPLEMENTATION AND REPLICATING PRACTICE:

First and foremost there has to be a dedicated group of special education teachers committed to the premise that they can effect change for the better for all special education students.

We have identified 6 main factors that a school's special education teachers should follow to successfully implement the program we have developed:

1. Have Clear Goals- Success is not an accident. Each school must develop long-term and short-term goals that fit the needs of that school's student population.
2. Marketing Plan- Before the program is implemented it must be successfully "sold" to the faculty since they will be the ones who will be putting it into practice. Based on

the faculty, decisions need to be made on how to present the change and how to implement the change. Mechanics need to be worked out ahead of time. The faculty must feel a part of the process.

3. Gathering Support- The most important person here is the Principal who sets the mood and tone for the faculty to be receptive to the change. Support also is very important from the "Key" mainstream teachers in each department as well as consultants and district administrators.
4. Evaluate - As you implement the program its effectiveness must be checked so its progress can be fine-tuned. This can be done with a separate one page survey for teachers, students, and parents. Evaluation should take place at the end of the first semester and at the end of the first year.
5. Revisions- Using the information from the surveys, changes will be made to make the program more efficient and effective to meet the needs of all students. Site-based management teams have been very effective in this area.
6. Commitment - Above all, everyone should keep in mind what is best for the student and work together toward that goal. We found commitment is easy to maintain when teachers see student growth in all areas. The faculty commitment results in it becoming "their program" with the special education teachers acting as facilitators.

We have found when the above factors are followed there is a very smooth implementation and results in a very cost

effective program.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION RESULTS:

Most of the evaluation results are naturally built into Model for Mainstreaming, The Synergistic Approach. Increased amount of time in the regular classroom is very easy to measure and track. Since all special education students are mainstreamed into all regular classes, most of their school day is in the regular class. The increased amount of time in the regular class can be documented by each student's schedule that reflects that the student is enrolled in mainstream classes. The best example of increased time in the regular classes is a student coming from a central program AIMS class. An AIMS class is usually a self-contained severe or self-contained mild to moderate instructional arrangement; therefore, the majority of instruction occurs in the special education classroom. In Model for Mainstreaming, the previous AIMS student starts out in all regular classes. There is a transitional/adjustment period that allows the student to take advantage of the special education services, and the student may spend a part of each period in the resource room. As the student's skills, self-esteem, and confidence build, he finds it is not necessary to spend as much time in the resource room. With all special education students there is a tendency to spend less time in the resource room as they progress from the sophomore to senior year.

Gain in student test scores and attainment of objectives

on the IEP are closely related, and they are both measured by criterion-referenced testing and report cards. All students make progress in attaining the goals of the IEP. This progress is documented when criterion-referenced testing validates the skills gained. Report cards also reflect this progress. Improved test scores are measured by improved achievement levels on criterion-referenced testing. Also passing grades or report cards measure higher test scores.

Teacher/parent/student satisfaction of the program was measured by informal surveys. All three groups reported satisfaction. Parent support was overwhelming because student achievement in both social and academic areas exceeded all hopes. The summary of student satisfaction was that each student was very happy because he/she felt a part of the whole school, felt a lack of isolation and social stigma, and felt he/she learned more. Teacher satisfaction ranged from excellent to fair. More teachers experienced high satisfaction than fair. Those teachers with high satisfaction found enrichment in all aspects of teaching with handicapped students. Each high satisfaction teacher felt that he/she learned more than the handicapped students.

The overall evaluation results used several measures. These measures include: schedules, criterion-referenced testing, report cards, and informal surveys. The groups targeted in the evaluation results were: students, parents, and teachers. These informal evaluation measures have been used for fifteen years.